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Dear Client:

**Do you want to pay a tax to drive into downtown Austin? A *tax*, not a *toll*. Congestion-charging zones (CCZ) are already in place in some important cities, and being planned in others, as a way to reduce roadway crowding in central cities. CCZ's are just one solution being bandied about, that also have the added advantage of generating revenue. They all have one thing in common – changing the way you pay for driving a vehicle.**

While congestion is one of the driving forces, dwindling sources of revenue are also a big contributing factor. **The standard taxes you pay at the pump for gasoline are becoming less and less adequate to handle the increasing number of vehicles**, according to *The Economist*. And, face it, local and Washington legislators have shown no appetite for raising gasoline taxes.

CCZ's have their champions. There has been no serious public discussion about a CCZ for downtown Austin. However, even as we speak, New York's **Gov Andrew Cuomo is pushing a CCZ tax for access to Manhattan**. But, the outcome is far from certain.

Why? Take a look at London. A CCZ was put in place there in 2003, but the city is now seeing congestion rising again. Seems market forces are at play in London. **Uber drivers, taxis and vans figured out they could pay one tax for entry and spend hours driving around picking up riders, increasing congestion**. So the CCZ may go down as a failed experiment.

**Still, fuel tax revenues are drying up even as more vehicles crowd roadways.** The problem of reducing revenue is multi-faceted: better gas mileage (fuel efficiency has roughly doubled in the past 25 years) ... more electric/hybrid cars, that are subsidized to increase production, etc. **So, some form of pay-by-mile is gaining steam.**

A variety of ways to charge you for driving a vehicle are in the experimental stage – all **bolstered by scary, unbelievable leaps in technological capabilities**. In less than three years, Singapore will use a **GPS-based system to vary the amount it charges drivers based on distance, time, location and vehicle**. At the same time, drivers will receive real-time info about the cost and “busyness” of roads, encouraging them to consider other routes. Closer to home, **California** and **Colorado** have received federal grants for trials of various pay-to-drive schemes. We'll detail what **Oregon** is doing with 1,500 drivers in the next item.

**Innovative schemes to charge motorists for using their vehicles are sprouting up all over. There is no groundswell to raise the gasoline tax, so as those revenues decline, alternative income sources are being explored to make up for the diminishing funds. Oregon is using some federal bucks to experiment with one method.**

Advances in technology may make Oregon's experiment obsolete in the near future. But for the time being, **1,500 motorists have signed up for OReGO's effort**, according to *The Economist*. It involves placing specific devices in cars.

These devices take data from the engines' computers. **The gadgets record the amount of fuel used and distance driven** and transmit the data via mobile networks. These motorists are then charged based on how far they drive. **Each mile costs the driver 1.5 cents.**

**Yeah, but those drivers still pay state gasoline taxes when they fill up at the pump.** In Oregon, it is 30-cents a gallon. So, how is this handled? **It is refunded to the 1,500 volunteers.** The future of this experiment is uncertain. It is not known whether this scheme will replace Oregon's state fuel tax. But as these sorts of experiments expand, they may start to weaken the taboo against new taxes.

**As far as Austin and Texas are concerned, no such experiments are imminent.** But it is a growing movement nationwide, and even worldwide. Food for your future thought.

**Future transportation project update: backers of the 240-mile high speed bullet train proposed to dash between Dallas-Fort Worth and Houston have chosen two high-powered engineering/construction firms to make the privately-funded venture a reality.**

Flour Enterprises and Lane Construction were announced this week as part of the team to develop the project that will zip travelers between those metros in less than 90 minutes. The developer, **Texas Central Partners, has indicated Austin will be the next metro,** if the current effort is successful.

**Another transportation update: the long-range plan for Capital Metro to put Express buses on an expanded IH-35 to/through downtown Austin is getting a bit of a push-back from the Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT).**

**TxDOT is questioning whether CapMetro's projected ridership figures are too high.** Frankly, though, at this early stage -- well before the expansion has been designed -- projections are fuzzy at best, either high or low. Better numbers are probably a long way off

**As we've recently been reporting, the City of Austin is moving full speed ahead to reach an energy goal of 55%-65% electrical power generated by wind and solar within ten years. This is not enough for some. Dozens rallied in Austin a week ago seeking a 100% goal. In other words, they want to totally withdraw from reliance on fossil fuel-generated electricity. Well, a reader asked, what will this cost?**

For the answer, let's turn to a spokesman for Austin Energy (AE), the city-owned utility that currently provides electricity to you from **power plants using natural gas, coal and nuclear power**. **Robert Cullick** told the *Austin American-Statesman* that "pushing to 100% renewable energy would cause rate hikes." Break that down for us, Robert.

Under *current* goals (the 55%-to-65% in ten years) **your electrical bills would increase up to 11%**, simply because renewable energy costs more. Alright, what about going all the way to 75%? What would that do to your electricity cost? **It could increase your bills by 13.5%**. And 100%? Forget it. Austin Energy doesn't even have an estimate how much this would increase your electricity bill.

Right now, 37% of the city's electrical power comes from renewable such as solar and wind energy. **AE says 100% renewable energy isn't practical in the near term**. After all, how would it provide power when the sun doesn't shine or the wind doesn't blow?

**Every single day the news is Trump-this or Trump-that. Most of it is dumping on the president in a very personal way, no matter the topic. And, oh yeah, how no major legislation has passed the Congress. But, the major *under-reported* stories are how the US government is being transformed in very significant ways – almost the polar opposite of what occurred during the previous eight years.**

Policies and procedures are being changed almost daily at various government agencies like the Environmental Protection Agency, the US Justice Department, the Commerce Department, the Department of Energy -- even the military. **Past policies have been scrapped and new, very different, approaches installed**. Because of the relentless news coverage of the Trump developments-of-the-day, this dramatic transformation slips beneath media's radar.

And, Texas is right in the middle of all this. Take the judiciary. Federal court vacancies are being filled at a record pace and Texas has more openings (13) than any other state. **The openings are *lifetime* appointments and most, if not all, are being filled with young, conservative judges in the mold of Supreme Court Justice Neil Gorsuch.**

Remember, the Democrats abolished the filibuster as a device to stop judicial appointments. **So, from immigration to voting rights to social legislation, look for sea change decisions that will have an impact for generations**, even if Trump does not serve a second term.

**Think Austin traffic congestion has been pretty bad this summer? Well, hang on. It's about to get worse quickly -- not necessarily because of construction. There will be dramatically more cars on area roadways due to two events: students returning to UTAustin, and the beginning of public schools. Roadways will jam at key times with vehicles and school buses. Here's what you can look for:**

Austin area independent school districts are thankfully **staggering their opening dates so the full impact will not be felt all at once**. How widespread is all this? There are 576 school zone signals that fall within seven school districts in Austin. That's a bunch.

It's already gradually starting this week (**Lake Travis & Georgetown ISDs**). But next week, the full impact will be felt Monday-Wednesday when cars from **Austin, Eanes and Round Rock ISDs** hit Austin roadways. Other suburbs and outlying areas (such as **Pflugerville, Del Valle, Leander, and San Marcos**) complete the buildup August 28<sup>th</sup>.

UTAustin provides a different sort of impact. **Tens of thousands of cars will descend upon Austin, bringing students to fill campus housing and apartments in the area**. While some are already arriving, the official registration for fall classes is **August 29<sup>th</sup> and classes start August 30<sup>th</sup>**. Their impact will be felt almost around the clock, not just in the drive times.

Now, here's what could be a **really big disruption** – especially downtown. Saturday, September 3<sup>rd</sup>, the first **Longhorn home football game kicks off in the 100,000+-seat DKR-Memorial Stadium at 11 am**. And, if that's not enough, as of this writing, the **Texas Confederate Militia has set a Dixie Freedom Rally September 3<sup>rd</sup> at Wooldridge Park, 900 Guadalupe, to be followed by a march to the Capitol**. Oh yeah, activists are already planning a **counter protest event, claiming 2,000 may show up**. In light of the violence that erupted last week in Charlottesville, Virginia under similar circumstances, this bears watching. Don't know how all this will unfold, if at all, but you need to stay tuned and plan accordingly.

**Dr. Louis Overholster** says he'd like to see a protestor hold a sign reading "I hate crowds!"

Sincerely,



Editor/Publisher